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An Inaugural Essay On Rheumatism

Passed March 12th 1828

By

Andrew Ellicott Kennedy

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Pennsylvania

March 6th 1828

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Rheumatism, may be defined to be a disease, consisting of pain of a peculiar kind, with swelling and redness about the large joints, and surrounding muscles, attended with inflammatory action, and constant tendency to wander from joint to joint; occasioned by the influence of variable temperature, or by direct cold, or by moisture.

It is divided by authors into two species. Viz. Acute, and Chronic.

The acute is generally ushered in by rigors, followed by flushings of the face, and partial heat of the body, by nausea or vomiting, general lassitude, and depression of spirits, with universal soreness and aching.

The disease is peculiarly characterized by the local symptoms, which either appear simultaneously with the constitutional, or follow in very quick succession. The lower extremities are usually selected for the attack, and it is easily distinguished by the great

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pain and swelling, which affect the joints, with inability to move them, and generally with redness more or less bright, the joints are tender to the touch, the pains greatly aggravated at night, and by external heat. The swelling does not assume the form of the joint, but is diffused over the cellular membrane in the neighbourhood. Several joints are often simultaneously affected, and it is in a remarkable degree the nature of Rheumatic inflammation to change its seat quickly, and attack another part, with an abatement of all the symptoms in the part originally affected, this transfer takes place with great rapidity, and the symptoms display themselves with great intensity and acuteness.

When the sympathetic fever is permanently established, it presents some striking peculiarities. The pulse is increased in frequency and fullness, but does not possess the hardness which is peculiar to it during the inflammation of

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an internal disease. Seldom exceeding 110 or 115 strokes in the minute: The skin is generally hot and dry, but I have seen one or two cases in which the skin was in a soft and perspirable condition throughout the whole attack. The tongue is at first coated with a white fur, but soon becomes darker and thicker, varying according to the condition of the alimentary canal. The thirst is sometimes very distressing, the bowels constipated, although easily aperated on, the secretion of urine is scanty, of a bloodred colour, and depositing a copious lateritious sediment, there is a pallidness and an anxious peculiar expression of countenance, alternating with flushings indicating at once the severity of the attack.

As the local and constitutional symptoms of Rheumatism, differ from those of other forms of inflammatory fever, its terminations are no less peculiar.— The local inflammation runs high, but seldom or never terminates in suppuration,

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it is not often that any serious injury is done to the joints, sometimes effusions of a gelatinous fluid take place around the joint, but they are soon taken up by the absorbents.

To Metastasis, a very important peculiarity in Rheumatic inflammation, and which I have already adverted to, are we indebted for most of the danger attending this complaint, almost every organ is liable to it. The bowels, Kidneys, and lungs (so far as I can learn) are the organs which most generally suffer from this translation.

Acute Rheumatism will sometimes degenerate into the chronic form, in unhealthy constitutions, when the best treatment has been adopted, but such results may generally be attributed to bad management, on the part of the Physician, impurities of the patient, in exposing himself too early in the commencement of his convalescence to cold or moisture, indulgence

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of the appetite or dyspepsia of any description whatever.

No inflammatory affection that I have come under my notice, is so liable to relapses from slight causes as Rheumatism —

Exposure to a draught of air if only for a moment, too much exercise of a particular joint, or a debauch will often rein-state the disease with all its original violence.

This disease is also peculiar as regards its tendency to return after long intervals those who have once suffered from an attack are at all times in danger of its return, and of course should be careful to avoid its exciting causes, or obviate them as far as possible, by particular attention to the clothing. Flannel next to the skin should never be neglected, and if the patient cannot bear the irritation produced by the flannel the garment may be

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Children are seldom affected by acute Rheumatism adults from the age of 25 yrs to that of 55, and generally those of full plethoric habits are most frequently the subjects of this complaint.

It prevails principally in the Winter and Spring months, and during damp, disagreeable weather in August and September.

The Curative Treatment of acute Rheumatism is nearly the same as that of an inflammatory fever of any other form. The morbid excitement must be reduced by a course strictly antiphlogistic.

If the habits of the patient are such as to bear general bleeding we must resort to it as the leading remedy, and it must be repeated in proportion as the violence of the symptoms and the state of the pulse may

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demand it, but at the same time we must be cautious in the use of the lancet, for in no way is a degeneracy into the chronic form of the disease so readily induced as by ~~the~~ its injudicious use.

Topical bleeding, by means of leeches may be advantageously resorted to, after the general excitement has been reduced by proper general depletion.

After pre depletion has been premised, if we have reason to believe that the stomach is loaded with undigested food, or suffering irritation from vitiated secretions, we may have recourse to an emetic, with almost certainty of deriving benefit from its action, not only as evacuating the stomach, in the shortest and most effectual manner, but from its influence on the circulatory system and by the complete relaxation of the skin, which it tends to produce, Ipecacuanha, as being one of the mildest of the class, should

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be preferred for females, or patients of delicate habits but for those of full habit Tart. Emetic is the most useful, so far as my observations go.

Purgatives may be next resorted to, with very great advantage, the benefits of making a derivation from the circulation through the medium of the alimentary canal and kidneys is as remarkable in this disease as in any of the other forms of inflammation.

Mercurial Cathartics have been generally premised, and are certainly productive of very great benefit, but in my own practice I have found no prescription more useful than the following, from Scudamore

℞ Sulph. Magnes ℥ij
Carb. Magnes
Acet. Colchicum aa ℥i
Tart. Ant. gr ½
Aquæ ℥iij
Misce Haustus

I have prescribed it daily for a week, following its operation, with 10 grains of the Compound Powder at bed time. My patients were generally

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much pleased with its effects, and generally rests well at night. I have never known it to occasion vomiting, and can safely say that I have never seen any ill effects result from its use. — Many of the old patients in the Outwards of the Alms House have applied to me for the Rheumatism powder when their feelings indicated an attack.

Relaxation of the Skin, with moderate and uniform diaphoresis, is very easy, as equally soothing and serviceable. The acetate of ammonia in combination with minute proportions of Tartar Emetic is very useful during the paroxysm of fever, when the fever is abated, the Seven powder in doses of from 5 to 10 grains every 3 or 4 hours, will, in almost all cases promote, and support a moderate perspiration.

In acute Rheumatism, the force of the circulation is so much increased, so many parts are affected with inflammation, and the expectation which it manifests to metastasis

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is so great, and in every way dangerous, that the propriety of a topical application has been much doubted, but when the general excitement has been subdued, and the inflammation presents a distinct local character, local applications become exceedingly useful. The following lotion I have used with much satisfaction

℞ Sol. Acet plumb ℥iij
Spts. Camph ℥iij
M

Blisters I have found useful, when the local inflammation was intractable or purulent.

It is not uncommon, for the disease in the last stages, to assume the intermittent type, more or less strongly marked; and the pain attended with distinct intermissions. under these circumstances, the Cinchona has been highly extolled by some writers, I have never seen a case of the kind but which recovered under a strict antiphlogistic treatment, allowing the stomach and bowels, to recover their tone, and

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healthy condition, and I believe that this state is chiefly induced by a disordered state of those organs.

By Chronic Rheumatism, is understood that form of the disease, which is unaccompanied by inflammatory fever, and scarcely marked by any signs of local inflammation.

The causes which we have pointed out, in producing the acute form of the disease, will apply equally well as to the Chronic.

Cold and Moisture, we have considered as the insidious agents, operating as predisposing and exciting causes producing effects, modified by the manner of application, and constitution of the individual;

Many of the patients labouring under the Chronic Rheumatism, who came under my notice in the Alms House, dated their disease from a previous attack of Syphilis, but whether it was produced by

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the disease, or by the mercurial course, under which they were placed, I could not determine.

Chronic Rheumatism is characterized by pain of the joints which is aggravated by motion, more or less disposed to wander, and alleviated by external heat, the parts are swelled, very readily, or spontaneously growing cold, occasionally attended by tumefaction, and seldom attended by febrile excitement.

The change of structure from long continued attacks of Chronic Rheumatism, may be considered as the most unpleasant, of its consequences. - we find the bursa, and tendinous sheaths thickened and hardened, the tendons knotty and contracted, the muscles much reduced in size, feeling to the touch like tendons, and the cellular membrane almost entirely absorbed, the joints much distorted, and

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permanently fixed in a most unsightly manner, the fingers and venus suffer most, from this cause.

Treatment. In some of the forms of this complaint, general bleeding may be useful, but it is invariably hurtful, when employed solely for that complaint, without strict attention being paid to the state of the constitution, and habits of the patient. In some constitutions, the inflammatory symptoms display themselves with considerable violence. Under such circumstances the cautious use of the lancet is highly beneficial.

When against manifest signs of increased vascular action, local depletion, by means of leeches or cupping, often proves useful. The relief is more decided, when the part affected is not, simply diseased, but, when it is so situated, and the superficial capillaries, action, the dry cupping may be advantageously employed.

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Chronic Rheumatism, may be sometimes cured by diaphoresis. This mode of treatment, is adapted to those cases where there is some degree of febrile excitement, when the pain is of short standing, and erratic. The Warm bath, with small doses of the Dovers powder, several times during the day, will generally effect this object in a very satisfactory manner.

If the affection be aggravated with a torpid state of the alimentary canal, mercurial Cathartics, should be employed, when the local affection is not complicated with irritable stomach and bowels, the Calomel may be advantageously used, and particularly when combined with Calcined Magnesia, or Epsom Salts.

The Seidlitz aperients, I have found exceedingly useful in those cases where it could be traced to Syphilis, or the suppressed menses, and particularly when the

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Peritoneum was affected.

It would be useless for me to enumerate all the different remedies which are used in the treatment of this disease but I cannot pass over a remedy which to the best of my knowledge was introduced into the practice of the Alms House by Professor Chapman and from which signal benefit has been derived from its use, and particularly in one or two cases under his immediate direction. I allude to the Savin, it is given in doses of 10 grains, increasing daily until an impression is made on the system.

In Chronic Rheumatism pain is impossible to be relieved, Opium is our only effectual remedy. large doses of Dover's Powders should be given at night, the costiveness which is induced by the opium, may be obviated by some mild laxative, such as Magnesia or Rochelle salts.

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may be considered the most important, it gives tone to the muscular fibre, excites a better circulation in the capillary vessels, overcomes the rigidity of parts, and improves the motion, increases the absorption of effusions into the cellular tissue, and counteracts that torpor of all the vessels, in the different textures, which is so apt to be the consequence of long continued Rheumatic inflammation.

In concluding, I may say a few words on the subject of regimen and diet.

The invalid should use moderate exercise, carefully avoiding exposure to cold and moisture, but if he should unfortunately be chilled, he should restore the warmth of the skin, by friction, with the flesh brush, or warm flannel, he should wear flannel next the skin, and particularly a roller on the affected limb. As regards diet it should be light, but nutritious, ardent spirits should be peremptorily forbidden.